



ACCESS CURRENTS

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Board Conducts Public Forum on its Agenda and Services

As part of program of seminars to recognize the ADA's 15th anniversary, the Board held a public forum on its agenda and services. The event allowed the public to make recommendations to the Board on topics or issues that should be addressed in its work writing guidelines and standards or sponsoring research. The Board also welcomed suggestions for new guidance and training materials and how this information and related services can be delivered most effectively to its various audiences.



Board members listen to comments received from the public at the forum.

The feedback received at this forum, which attracted a wide audience, touched on a variety of topics, including information technology, indoor environmental quality, communication access, mobility access, and guidance materials, among others. It was recommended that the Board take an active role in coordinating its work on access to electronic and information technology with international organizations, such as the European Union, in order to advance global harmonization and standardization. In addition, it was recommended that the Board address new or convergent types of technologies through its 508 standards and to harmonize them with guidelines for websites developed by the World Wide Web Consortium.

Participants also urged the Board to undertake actions to help improve the quality of indoor environments, particularly for those who have multiple chemical sensitivities or electromagnetic sensitivities. Attention was called to a newly released report from a study the Board sponsored on strategies for improving indoor environmental quality.

A number of comments addressed communication access for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of visual fire alarms in sleeping rooms, accessible carbon monoxide detectors, and the need to address other types of alarms that may not require building evacuation. Other issues noted included access to public address system information, including life safety instructions, and two-way communication systems, such as those at drive-through windows.

Recommendations were received on ways to improve access for people with vision impairments. These suggestions addressed criteria for tactile informational signs, lighting and sign illumination, barriers or tactile markings to distinguish pedestrian ways through parking lots from vehicle routes, among others. Support was expressed for addressing detectable warnings and audible pedestrian signals in the Board's rulemaking on public rights-of-ways. The Board also received feedback on other topics and specific suggestions for guidance materials, research projects, training, outreach, and web-based services.

The Board's forum was part of a series of programs on different aspects of the ADA organized by the National Council on Disability (NCD) in cooperation with various Federal agencies. For further information, visit the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/news/ada-forum.htm and the NCD's website at www.ncd.gov. Videos of the Board's session and other programs and events are available at www.at508.com/events.

Meeting Held on Promoting Accessible Design in Education

In recognizing the critical role education plays in ensuring access for people with disabilities to the built environment, the Board is undertaking an initiative to promote accessible design in the education of architects, interior designers, engineers and others. As a first step in this endeavor, the Board held a forum to get advice from various experts on how it should proceed. Specifically, the Board sought input on how this effort can be advanced through education curricula, design competitions and awards, and outreach to colleges, universities, and accrediting organizations. The event was held July 25th during a week of events celebrating the 15th anniversary of the ADA.

Over 30 participants, including representatives from university programs, accrediting organizations, trade associations, professional societies, and disability groups, provided guidance and suggestions on how this initiative can be undertaken most effectively and strategically. Many recommendations focused on how training on accessible design could be made an integral part of the education curricula. Input was received on various considerations involved in advancing this goal and suggestions were made on the shape and substance of courses and training materials. For example, the Board was cautioned against relying on a “one size fits all” approach since design programs among accredited schools vary widely. However, the belief was expressed that efforts should be undertaken that will constructively influence education curricula and programs. Several participants emphasized the importance of covering the “whys” or reasoning behind design requirements and the effectiveness of involving people with disabilities and real-life experiences in courses and programs. It was also recommended that the Board not focus solely on students in light of the continuing education requirements and practices among design professions.

The discussion also touched on various venues for providing education and training on accessible design, training materials and potential partnerships, the effectiveness of design competitions and outreach efforts to schools, accrediting bodies, and professional and student societies. Additional information is posted on Board’s website at www.access-board.gov/news/edu-forum.htm.



Board Hosts Meeting of North American Representatives

On July 28th the Board hosted a meeting of representatives from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico to discuss access issues in the built environment, share information, and learn more about each country’s accessibility codes and standards. The meeting and exchange of information provided an initial step in a process to improve coordination among North American countries on accessible design and solutions to access issues.

Betty Dion, Chair of the International Commission on Technology and Accessibility - Global, helped organize the full-day event, which was held in Washington, D.C. The event featured presentations by officials from codes and standards organizations in each country and a discussion session. There were also presentations made on international standards, research on space requirements for powered mobility devices, and the results of studies on evacuation of people with disabilities from the World Trade Center after the terrorist attack of September 11th. Members from each country supported further efforts to coordinate their work on access codes and standards and to develop a cooperative network in order to improve accessibility in all three nations. The event helped lay the groundwork for stronger avenues of communication and greater coordination not only on design standards, but also on technological advances and research outcomes. For further information on this event, contact Marsha Mazz of the Board at mazz@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0020 (voice), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

Comment Period Closes on Draft Guidelines for Passenger Vessels

July 28th marked the close of the comment period for materials the Board released last November on access to passenger vessels. This material included draft guidelines for large vessels, such as cruise ships, and a notice outlining several different options on addressing access to smaller vessels, such as water taxis and excursion boats. During the comment period, the Board held three public hearings, the last of which took place in Washington, D.C. on July 25th. Comments received, included testimony at these hearings, are posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/pvaac/comments/index.htm. The Board will revise the draft guidelines based on its review of the comments and make this information available for a follow-up round of comment.



Report on Indoor Environmental Quality Released

A growing number of people suffer a range of debilitating physical reactions from exposures to everyday materials and chemicals found in building products, floor coverings, cleaning products, and fragrances, among others. There are those who have developed an acute sensitivity to various types of chemicals, a condition known as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). The range and severity of reactions are as varied as the potential triggering agents. In addition, there are others who report reactions from exposures to electrical devices and frequencies, a condition referred to as Electro-Magnetic Sensitivity (EMS).

In response to these concerns, the Board sponsored a study on ways to improve indoor environmental quality for people with MCS and EMS as well as for the population generally. Conducted for the Board by the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS), this project brought together various stakeholders to explore issues and to develop an action plan. A copy of the resulting report is now available on the NIBS website at <http://ieq.nibs.org>. While the project focused on commercial and public buildings, many of the issues addressed and recommendations offered are applicable in residential settings. The report includes recommendations on improving indoor environmental quality that address building products, materials, ventilation, and maintenance.

Board Publishes Editorial Corrections to the ADA and ABA Guidelines

On August 5th the Board issued corrections to the updated guidelines it published last year under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). The revisions are editorial in nature and do not change the substance of any provisions. For example, defined terms are italicized consistently throughout the document, and in several instances this convention was inadvertently omitted. The published amendments cover these and similar corrections and are posted the Board's website at www.access-board.gov.

Board Seeks Information Technology Access Specialist

The Board has a vacancy for a senior accessibility specialist (GS-14) in its Office of Technical and Information Services. The position is focused on access for people with disabilities to information and telecommunication technologies and products. Duties include providing technical assistance and training to the public on Board guidelines and standards, including standards for electronic and information technology issued under the Rehabilitation Act (section 508) and guidelines for telecommunication products covered by the Telecommunications Act (section 255). In addition, the incumbent will oversee Board efforts to review, update, and supplement these design criteria. The position description and instructions for applying are posted on the USAJobs website at www.usajobs.opm.gov. The application deadline is September 16, 2005. Questions about this posting should be directed to Tanya Johnston of the Access Board at (202) 272-0004 (voice), (202) 272-0082 (TTY), (202) 272-0081 (fax), or johnston@access-board.gov (e-mail).

Winning Design Selected for Amusement Ride Transfer Device

The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA), in partnership with the Board, organized a competition for the design of a transfer device that can be used to facilitate access to amusement rides. Guidelines the Board issued under the ADA for amusement rides permit use of a transfer device but do not include design specifications. The goal of the design competition was to inspire creative solutions for such a device, specifically one that could serve rides that have seats lower than load platforms which pose particular transfer challenges. Entries from engineering and accessibility design professionals and college students were received. A panel organized by IAAPA and the Board reviewed the designs and selected the top three designs. The three winning design teams, each from the University of Kansas School of Mechanical Engineering, will receive monetary awards. The first place team will receive additional funding to construct a desktop model of its design to be showcased at IAAPA's annual expo, which will be held November 14-19, 2005 in Atlanta. For more information, visit IAAPA's website at www.iaapa.org.

Winners

(University of Kansas School of Mechanical Engineering Teams)

1st Place (\$5000)

Tyler Docking, Matthew Hess,
Carla Hines, Francis Hirschmann

2nd place (\$500)

Chris Anderson, Jesse Burns,
Chris Dvorak, Tanner Rinke

3rd Place (\$200)

Adrien Bender, Randy Clover,
Paul Rankin, Mark Wolfe

Classroom Acoustics Standard Available Free from ASA

The Acoustical Society of America (ASA), in partnership with several industry supporters, is making design standards for classroom acoustics available free through its website. *The American National Standard Acoustical Performance Criteria, Design Requirements, and Guidelines for Schools (ANSI S12.60-2002)* provides criteria that benefit all classroom users, including students with hearing loss. ASA developed the standard through a working group with input and sponsorship from the Board. Several states have adopted the standard which is voluntary unless referenced by a code, ordinance, or regulation. Previously published for sale, the standard can now be downloaded free through ASA's online store at <http://asastore.aip.org/>.

Access Currents is a free newsletter issued by the Access Board every other month by mail and e-mail. Send questions or comments to news@access-board.gov or call (800) 872-2253 ext. 0026 (voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY). Mailing address: 1331 F Street, N.W., Suite 1000; Washington, D.C. 20004-1111.

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